

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 6019

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS, PINS, PGOV, LA

SUBJECT: LAO SUSPICIONS ABOUT THAI INVOLVEMENT IN

AUGUST 20 COUP ATTEMPT

BEGIN SUMMARY: DESPITE A NUMBER OF REASSURING MOVES
TAKEN BY THE RTG, THE BELIEF IS STILL WIDESPREAD IN
VIENTIANE THAT SOME ELEMENTS IN THAI GOVERNMENT HAD A
ROLE IN AUGUST 20 COUP ATTEMPT. THIS SUSPICION, WHICH
DOES NOT APPEAR GROUNDED IN ANY SPECIFIC EVIDENCE, IS
NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISING CONSIDERING THE CHARACTER
OF THE ATTEMPT AND OF ITS LEADERS. THE IRRITATING EFFECTS
OF THIS BURR IN THAI-LAO RELATIONS MIGHT BE CURTAILED OR
MINIMIZED BY SOME POSITIVE AND VISIBLE EVIDENCE OF THAI
FOLLOW-UP TO THE EXPRESSED SUPPORT EARLIER ANNOUNCED BY
PRIME MINISTER THANOM. END SUMMARY

1. PRIME MINISTER SOUVANNA AND OTHER LAO LEADERS WELCOMED
PRIME MINISTER THANOM'S PROMPT MESSAGE AUGUST 20 EXPRESSING
COMPLETE FOR THE LAO GOVERNMENT HEADED BY SOUVANNA.
OTHER THAI UNDERTAKINGS, INCLUDING IMPROVED SURVEILLANCE
OF THE BORDER AND REPORTEDLY OF LAO EXILES LIVING IN
THAILAND, HAVE ALSO BEEN WELL RECEIVED. REGARDLESS OF
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THESE AND OTHER LESS PUBLIC ACTIONS TAKEN BY RTG (AS RE-

PORTED BANGKOK 13275 AND PREVIOUS MESSAGES), INFLUENTIAL LAO LEADERS STILL SUSPECT THAT SOME ELEMENTS IN THE RTG MUST HAVE PLAYED SOME ROLE SYMPATHETIC TO THE AUGUST 20 COUP ATTEMPT. THESE SUSPICIONS, OF COURSE, ORIGINATE FROM THE FACT THAT THE COUP WAS LED BY LAO LONG RESIDENT IN BANGKOK AND THAT THESE LEADERS WERE ABLE TO ENTER AND EXIT LAOS ACROSS WHAT HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN HERALDED AS A WELL-CONTROLLED BORDER. MOREOVER, THE REBELS ARE REPORTED TO HAVE BEEN CAPTURED CARRYING LARGE AMOUNTS OF THAI CURRENCY. THERE DOES NOT RPT NOT APPEAR TO BE ANY MORE SPECIFIC GROUNDS FOR THE CURRENT SUSPICIONS, ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF UNSUBSTANTIATED STORIES AND RUMORS HAVE MADE THE ROUNDS IN TOWN.

2. IN OUR CONVERSATIONS, LAO GENERALS HAVE REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED DISBELIEF THAT SUCH AN OPERATION COULD HAVE BEEN PLANNED AND CARRIED OUT IN THAILAND BY THE LAO EXILES WITHOUT AT LEAST TACIT ACQUIESCENCE OF SOMEONE IN THE RTG MILITARY HIERARCHY. LACKING A MORE SPECIFIC TARGET, A NUMBER OF LAO MILITARY GENERALS HAVE SINGLED OUT INTERIOR MINISTER PRAPHAT AS OBJECT OF SPECIAL SUSPICION--AGAIN WITHOUT ANY CONVINCING EVIDENCE.

3. LAO PRESS STORIES HAVE ECHOED THE SUSPICIONS WHICH THE LAO LEADERS EXPRESS IN THEIR CONVERSATIONS. THE LOCAL PAPERS, INCLUDING SIENG SERI AND XAT LAO, HAVE NOTED NOT ONLY THAT THE INSURGENTS HAD BEEN POLITICAL EXILES FROM THAILAND, BUT ASKED HOW THEY COULD HAVE RE-CROSSED THE RIVER BACK INTO THAILAND UNDETECTED UNLESS THEY WERE SOMEHOW IN LEAGUE WITH THE THAI. BOTH PAPERS REPORTED THAT THE RLG ON AUGUST 20 PRESENTED A NOTE OF PROTEST TO THE RTG REQUESTING IT TO TURN ALL THE INSURGENTS OVER TO THE RLG.

4. XAT LAO, THE MOST WIDELY-READ PAPER IN LAOS, CLAIMED ON AUGUST 22 THAT "THAILAND SERVED AS A JUMPING OFF POINT FOR THE REBELS. IT WAS IN THIS COUNTRY THAT THESE PERSONS DEVELOPED THEIR PLAN. THE THAI GOVERNMENT IS MORALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT HAPPENED." IT ALSO CALLED ON THE RTG TO SEND THE REBELS BACK TO BE JUDGED IN ACCORDANCE

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WITH THE LAO LAW. ON AUGUST 25, XAT LAO CARRIED AN ARTICLE HEADLINED "A SUSPECT FRIEND," WHICH RECALLED PREVIOUS COUP ATTEMPTS LAUNCHED BY LAO EXILED IN THAILAND. EACH TIME, THE ARTICLE ASSERTED, THE THAI GOVERNMENT DENIES ALL COMPLICITY; PROCLAIMS COMPLETE SUPPORT FOR LAO GOVERNMENT AND FOR THE PRIME MINISTER'S POLICY OF NEUTRALITY; AND DECLARES ITS READINESS TO ASSIST LAOS. BUT, WHY IS IT, XAT LAO ASKED RHETORICALLY, THAT THAILAND DOES NOT

TAKE NECESSARY STEPS TO PREVENT LAO POLITICAL EXILES FROM
USING THAI TERRITORY TO DEVISE ITS PLANS?

5. THE PRESS HAS ALSO BEEN ASKING HOW IT IS THAT THE
THAI, WHOSE INTERNAL SECURITY FORCES COMMAND RESPECT HERE,
HAVE BEEN UNABLE TO LOCATE EITHER COLONEL BOUNLEUTH (WHO,
REPORTEDLY, CROSSED BACK INTO THAILAND NEAR THAKHEK) OR
THE THREE OCCUPANTS OF THE U-17, WHICH LANDED IN A BALL-
FIELD NEAR BANGKOK, AFTER THE COUP ATTEMPT HAD FAILED. AFP,
ON AUGUST 26, QUOTED PHOUMI NOSAVAN AS DISCLAIMING ANY PART
OF THE COUP, BUT PROMISING TO RETURN TO LAOS LEGALLY "WHEN THE
YOUNGER GENERATION HAS DIVORCED THEMSELVES FROM THE OLD POL-
ITICIANS." SUCH REPORTS ALSO ADD FUEL TO THE SMOLDERING FIRE OF
SUSPICION WHICH MANY LAO FEEL POINTS TO--AT LEAST--THAI AC-
QUIESCENCE, IF NOT TACIT SUPPORT FOR, THAO MA AND HIS ILL-
FATED MEN.

6. UNDER BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, IT WILL TAKE SOME TIME
TO DISSIPATE THE LAO'S NEW FUND OF SKEPTICISM ABOUT GOOD-
WILL OF THAI AUTHORITIES. PRIME MINISTER THANOM'S VERBAL
REASSURANCES OF AUGUST 20 WERE TIMELY AND HELPFUL; BUT
TO BE CREDITABLE TO THE LAO, SUCH STATEMENTS MUST BE FOLLOWED
BY ACTIONS WHICH WOULD DEMONSTRATE IN SOME TANGIBLE WAY
THAI SINCERITY. ONE SUCH UNDERTAKING, OF COURSE, WOULD
BE THE RETURN TO LAOS OF INDIVIDUALS INVOLVED IN ATTEMPTED
COUP; ANOTHER THAT WOULD BE OF MORE MATERIAL BENEFIT, SHOULD
THE CURRENT RICE SHORTAGE CONTINUE, MIGHT BE THAI AUTHORI-
ZATION FOR INCREASE IN RICE EXPORTS TO LAOS IN
THE MONTH PRIOR TO THE RICE HARVEST IN LAOS.
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